



## **Ticket to Work in Washington State**



In November of this year Washington State residents with disabilities will begin to receive their "Ticket to Work" in the mail. The Social Security Administration will mail these Tickets over a ten-month period according to the last number of an individual's social security number. The Ticket will be mailed to almost all beneficiaries receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits.

Realizing that Washington residents need to understand the importance of the Ticket, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) took the lead in sponsoring recent conferences held on April 14 in Lynnwood and April 15 in Spokane. The Ticket program will support the competitive employment of people with significant disabilities under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) of 1999.

The primary focus of these conferences was to educate potential partners in the community about the Ticket to Work program and different components included in the TWWIIA legislation: the role of Employment Networks (ENs), Benefits Planning and Healthcare for Workers with Disabilities (HWD). Attendees learned about the

possibility of becoming an EN. ENs can accept the Ticket and provide services that help the beneficiary return to work. An overview of HWD was given to explain its role as a work incentive program that prevents people with disabilities from having to choose between healthcare and competitive employment. Other topics discussed were the Olmstead decision and the New Freedom Initiative, which promote living and working independently in the community.

The conferences were well attended with over 450 people listening to nationally recognized experts on many aspects of the TWWIIA legislation. Conference attendees considered the presentation very successful in educating them about how the Ticket to Work program will assist people going to work in Washington State. As stated very clearly by the DVR Director, Mike O'Brien, "DVR is very interested in supporting and/or partnering with as many employment networks that can be formed in our state." "Keeping people in the workplace is one of the key principles by which we operate. The Ticket is another way to help people realize their career dreams and improve the quality of their lives. At the same time, it helps decrease their dependence on public benefits."

Other agencies involved in the planning and development of these events include the following: Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, Employment Security Department, Washington Workforce Association, Department of Services for the Blind, Social Security Administration, Medical Assistance Administration, Aging and Disability Services Administration,

Division of Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health Division and the  
DSHS Olmstead Coordinator.